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WHAT KIND OF CITIZEN?
THE POLITICS OF ASSESSING DEMOCRATIC VALUES

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I was visiting a middle school the other day and saw a sign on a teacher's classroom wall that said "Assessment is your friend." It had a picture of a cuddly looking puppy on it. There was no explanation for the puppy, so I'm not sure why it was there. But it was cute and the message seemed to be saying that "assessment" if perhaps not man or woman's *best* friend, is, at the very least, something you need not fear. Now we are living in an era of high stakes testing and standards, so many would believe that there is much to fear about assessment. But what Joe Kahne, Bethany Rogers, and I are here to talk about today is program assessment, specifically assessment of educational programs that aim to promote good citizenship and, hence, democracy.

Those of us who have designed and run programs that we care about also have much to be concerned about program assessment. Two common complaints are that (1) the assessment didn't work—it didn't find changes even though we know this program accomplished a great deal; (2) the assessment did work, but it didn't capture the real strength of the program because this year, things didn't run as well as they could have.

For the next 40 minutes, though, I want to zero in on a third concern about assessing democratic values. It's the concern that is familiar to practitioners and it goes like this: "The assessment did not capture what was important to us." Why do we think this particular concern merits close attention? Because in our work over the past seven years, we have noticed a *broad* spectrum of ideas about citizenship embedded in actual programs but a relatively *narrow* idea of what's important to measure to find out if a program is working.

We titled this paper "What Kind of Citizen?" to call attention to data from our two and a half year study of ten service learning programs nationwide that embodied a spectrum of beliefs about what good citizenship *is* and what good citizens *do*. We added the subtitle "The Politics of Assessing Democratic Values" to reflect our belief that the narrow conception of citizenship embedded in too many current assessment efforts reflects neither arbitrary choices nor limits in assessment technology per se, but rather a political choice with political consequences.

I'm going to briefly describe two of the programs we studied and share some of the data—both quantitative and qualitative—that supports our call for more complex assessment strategies. I will be making the case that assessment strategies need to take into account the varied notions of citizenship reflected in different service learning and democratic education programs and that decisions programs make regarding these conceptions of citizenship as well as decisions researchers make are, in fact, political.

One caveat before we begin: this discussion aims to be illustrative, not exhaustive. There are many productive ways to frame a discussion about the attitudes, skills, and knowledge associated with effective citizenship and democracy. Our goal here, is not to specify “the way” to assess the development of citizens, but rather to expose some of the complexities and possibilities associated with this important task.

DATA AND METHOD

A quick note about our study method—if you're interested in more detail about the methodology, please contact us. The full paper will be published in 2001.

We studied 10 programs over two and a half years:

1. Observations — 2-3 days per site each year
2. Interviews — 6-15 students per site each year as well as relevant staff
3. Surveys — pre/post survey on student beliefs, efficacy, and commitments
4. Portfolio — collected student work from each program

WHAT KIND OF CITIZEN?

The service learning/democratic education programs we studied shared a basic set of priorities: they all hoped to teach democratic values through curriculum that engaged students in community projects. But the ten different curricula showed a variety of effects on students not all of which were shared across programs. In our study, we were interested in these kinds of questions:

- What kind of citizen does each program aim to develop?
- How do students of these programs see themselves engaging in civic life?
- What conception of "good" citizenship is reflected in the curriculum and outcomes of the programs studied?

Given the fuzziness in public discourse around good citizenship and in the research literature on democratic values, the variation across programs should come as no surprise. But by studying these programs in detail, three visions of "good" citizens emerged that can help make sense of the variation. We call these three visions of the good citizen: the Personally Responsible Citizen; the Participatory Citizen; and the Social Reformer. These three are not meant to be distinct (one program may demonstrate goals that fall into two or all three categories); but they can serve as a helpful guide to uncovering the variety of goals and assumptions that undergird these programs and curricular experiences (for more detail, see Kahne, Westheimer, and Rogers, 2000).

1. Personally Responsible Citizen

The vision of a Personally Responsible Citizen is of someone who acts responsibly in their community by picking up litter, for example, giving blood, recycling, volunteering, and staying out of debt. The Personally Responsible Citizen works and pays taxes, obeys laws, and helps those in need during times of crisis like a bad snow storm or floods. The Personally Responsible Citizen contributes to a food or clothing drive when asked and volunteers to help those less fortunate whether in a soup kitchen or a senior center. They might contribute time, money, or both to charitable causes.

Both those in the character education movement and those who advocate community service would emphasize this vision of good citizenship. Programs that seek to develop personally responsible citizens hope to build character and personal responsibility by emphasizing honesty, integrity, self-discipline, and hard work (Ryan, 1989; Wynne, 1989; Lickona, 1991).¹ Other programs that seek to develop personally responsible citizens hope to nurture compassion by engaging students in volunteer community service. Like the Points of Light Foundation, these programs hope to "help solve serious social problems" by "engag[ing] more people more effectively in volunteer service" (www.pointsoflight.org, April 2000).

2. Participatory Citizen

Others see good citizens as those who participate in the civic affairs and the social life of the community at local, state, and national levels. We called this kind of citizen the Participatory Citizen. Proponents of this vision emphasize preparing students to engage in community-based efforts of both government and non-government institutions to respond to social needs and improve society. Participatory Citizen programs aim to teach students about how government works and about the importance of participation in efforts to care for those in need, for example, or promote economic development, or clean up the environment. This perspective shares much with Benjamin Barber's notion of *strong democracy* in that it adopts a broad notion of the political sphere—one in which citizens "with competing but overlapping interests can contrive to live together communally" (118). The Participatory Citizen might organize a food drive for the homeless while the Personally Responsible Citizen would contribute some cans of food.

3. Social Reformer

A third image of a good citizen, and perhaps the perspective that is least commonly pursued, is of individuals who critically assess social, political, and economic structures and explore strategies for change that address root causes of problems. We call this vision of the good citizen the Social Reformer. The vision of the citizen as Social Reformer shares

¹ See also Schudson, *The Good Citizen*, 1998 for his discussion of 'colonial citizenship' "built on social hierarchy...and the traditions of public service, personal integrity, [and] charitable giving..." (294).

with the vision of the Participatory Citizen an emphasis on collective work related to the life and issues of the community. Those programs that emphasize social reform, however, seek to prepare students to improve society by critically analyzing and addressing social issues and injustices. These programs are less likely to emphasize the need for charity and volunteerism as ends in themselves and more likely to teach about social movements and how to effect systemic change. In other words, if Participatory Citizens are organizing the food drive and Individually Responsible Citizens are donating food, the Social Reformers are asking why people are hungry and acting on what they discover.²

Personally Responsible Citizen	Participatory Citizen	Social Reformer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acts responsibly in their community • Works and pays taxes • Picks up litter, recycles, and gives blood • Helps those in need, lends a hand during times of crisis • Obeys laws 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizes the importance of participation • Organizes community efforts to care for those in need, promote economic development, or clean up environment • Knows how government agencies work • Knows strategies for accomplishing collective tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critically assesses social, political, and economic structures • Explores strategies for change that address root causes of problems • Knows about social movements and how to effect systemic change • Seeks out and addresses areas of injustice

Figure 1. Kinds of Citizens

² We should note that helping students learn to think about and pursue social reform does not require that they be taught to adopt particular perspectives on particular policy issues. Indeed, our study indicated that the inverse seemed to be required. Students must learn to consider multiple perspectives (and the ways

ASSESSING DEMOCRATIC VALUES

It follows, of course, that if programs aim to develop different kinds of citizens and thereby advance different democratic values, that a one-size-fits-all assessment strategy would be unable to capture the complexity of these differences.

Currently, a great deal of assessment of service learning and other programs with democratic and civic goals views citizenship in narrow and generic terms. Much of this research adopts a traditional and politically conservative view of a good citizen that emphasizes personal responsibility and volunteerism. Individual acts of compassion and kindness are privileged over collective social action and the pursuit of social justice. Programs' effects on self esteem, willingness to volunteer, and responsibility for others are emphasized while few program evaluations measure students' ability to assess corporate responsibility or the ways government policies improve or harm society.

Perhaps because stances on these issues are more controversial—and funding for many of the studies comes from the government—such matters receive little attention even though citizens clearly must develop perspectives on these issues.

In other words, program assessment pays a great deal of attention to measuring the outcomes consistent with *personally responsible citizens*, some attention to the outcomes consistent with *participatory citizens*, and virtually no attention to outcomes essential for those programs that aim for *social reformers*.

Let me give you an example of some survey items commonly found in large scale evaluations of service learning programs (the items use a five point Likert scale based on responses ranging from "1—strongly disagree" to "5—strongly agree"):

- Taking care of people who are having difficulty caring for themselves is (everyone's responsibility including mine/is not my responsibility)

they align with varied interests and priorities) prior to reaching conclusions on actions to take. We go further in depth on this issue in other work.

- Helping others without being paid is (not something people should have to do/something every student should feel they have to do)
- Recycling cans, bottles, and other things is (too much of a hassle for me to bother with/everyone's job, including mine)

These questions (and many more like them) emphasize individual and charitable acts. They ignore important influences like social movements and government policy on efforts to improve society.³

These same surveys do not ask students questions that address issues such as:

- Should government fund social programs for those in need? When? Why? How much? What kinds?
- Are there enough jobs that pay decent wages for anyone who wants to work? How should society respond if there are not?
- When and in what ways should industries be regulated?

The exclusion of structural issues is best illustrated by this question that is commonly used as part of the scale in assessments of personal responsibility:

- The problems of pollution and toxic waste (are not my responsibility/are everyone's responsibility including mine).

This question shows how social action and corporate or government responsibility—both reasonable levers for change—are obscured by the narrow focus on the individual. Toxic waste, of course, is rarely the responsibility of individuals (unless hoards of people are running down to the river, cutting open their flashlight batteries, and dumping them in). Rather toxic waste, many would argue, is the result of industrial pollution, corporate greed, and inadequate legislation protecting the environment.

The point is not that there are “right” answers to these questions, but rather that it is important to monitor changes in student perspectives in relation to these issues of

³ See also, Kahne, Westheimer, & Rogers, *Service Learning and Citizenship: Directions for Research*, 2000.

government responsibility, employer responsibility, and students' desire to address issues of justice.

In studies of programs that seek to teach democratic values, citizenship and the idea of what a good citizen does continues to be narrowly construed (Westheimer & Kahne, 1998). The vast majority of large service learning initiatives share an orientation toward volunteerism and charity and away from teaching about social movements, social transformation, and systemic change. Accordingly, research and assessment has concentrated on a conception of citizenship that privileges individual acts of compassion and kindness over social action and the pursuit of social justice.

Let's look at two of the programs from our study to make the relevance of these differences clearer. I want to draw your attention to these two programs' overlapping but distinct civic and democratic priorities. Both programs worked with classes of high school students and both initiatives were designed to support the development of democratic and civic understandings and commitments. But their goals and strategies differed. The first aims to develop participatory citizens, the second social reformers.

MADISON COUNTY YOUTH SERVICE LEAGUE

The first program is called Madison County Youth Service League--these names are pseudonyms--and is run by two social studies teachers in a rural East Coast community ("East Coast" is not a pseudonym). The idea for the Madison County Youth Service League came to one of the teachers after she had attended a speech by Benjamin Barber focused on the importance of engaging students in public life. These teachers taught a condensed and intensified version of a standard government course during the first semester of the academic year to make space for projects in the community. During the second semester they placed students in small teams where they worked on service projects in their county's administrative offices. The service experiences were integrated into the high school government curriculum.

One group of students investigated whether citizens in their community would prefer curbside trash pickup that was organized by the county. They conducted phone interviews, undertook a cost analysis, and examined charts of projected housing growth to estimate growth in trash and its cost and environmental implications. Other students identified jobs that prisoners incarcerated for less than 90 days could perform and analyzed the cost of similar programs in other localities; another group explored the development of a five year plan for the fire and rescue department.

For each project, students had to collect and analyze data, interact with government agencies, write a report, and present their findings in a formal hearing in front of the county's Board of Supervisors.

The teachers of the Madison County Youth Service League believed that placing students in internships where they worked on meaningful projects under the supervision of committed role models would:

- First, teach students how government worked
- Second, help students recognize the importance of being actively involved in community issues
- And, third, provide students with the skills required for effective civic involvement.

In many respects, the Madison County Youth Service League appeared quite successful. Our interviews, observations, and survey data all indicated significant impact on students. Many talked about the power of the learning experience as compared to traditional classwork. Many students echoed Janine who said:

I learned more by doing this than I would just sitting in a classroom....I mean, you really don't have hands-on activities in a classroom. But when you go out [to the public agencies] instead of getting to read about problems, we see the problems. Instead of, you know, writing down a solution, we make a solution.

Another student said:

I kind of felt like everything that we had been taught in class, how the whole government works....We got to learn it and we got to go out and experience it. We saw things happening in front of us within the agency. I think it was more useful to put it together and see it happening instead of just reading from a book and learning from it

Several talked about the powerful impact of realizing that what they did would or could make a difference.

I thought it was just going to be another project. You know, we do some research, it gets written down and we leave and it gets put on the shelf somewhere. But in five years, this [curbside recycling] is going to be a real thing....It's really going to happen.

I didn't expect [our work] to have such an impact.....I mean, we've been in the newspaper, like, a lot.

When asked about how the program influenced their thinking, most students talked about how the experience deepened their belief in the importance of civic involvement.

I think if more people were aware of [ways they could participate] we wouldn't have as many problems, because they would understand that...people do have an impact. But I think in our community...people just don't seem to think that they will, so they don't even try.

The Madison County Youth Service League program aimed to promote civic participation consistent with a vision of participatory citizenship, to link service to academic content, and to provide a meaningful research experience. But the program did not aim to foster an understanding of structural or root causes of problems (social reform). While students did study controversial topics (finding work for prisoners, for example, or evaluating a detention center for juveniles) it did not take account of the diverse ideologies that inform political stances on such issues. Students said they learned a great deal about micro-politics such as how different government offices compete for funding. But they did not say they learned about broader ideological and political issues related to interest groups and the political process, the causes of poverty, different groups' need for health care, or the fairness of different systems of taxation (even though two projects focused on issues related to health care and taxation). Students focused on particular programs and policies and aimed for "technocratic/value neutral" analysis.

Accordingly, the curriculum did not appear to change students' interest in politics or their perspective on issues related to social justice or employer responsibility.

Quantitative Data

Quantitative data shows similar results. (See Figure 2.)

Statistically significant gains were recorded in several important areas.

Gains were recorded in knowledge/social capital needed for community development (1.08/yr1;.81/yr2), vision regarding ways to help the community (.48;.36), and of students' sense of agency - that they could make a difference in their community (.43;.25). Students involved in the program also increased scores on our measure of personal responsibility (.23;.27) and leadership efficacy (.28;.34). During the first year, students also reported following the news more closely (.35). This shift was not statistically significant during the second year (although there was a statistically significant increase in reports of reading the newspaper (.47). Finally, the program did not appear to alter students' interest in protests, their interest in politics, or their interest in political activity (voting, writing letters).

It did not show changes in other areas consistent with what many consider essential components of identity and participation in a democracy.

FACTORS (Chronbach's Alpha years 1, 2)	PRE-POST C H A N G E	
	MADISON COUNTY YOUTH SERVICE LEAGUE	BAYSIDE STUDENTS FOR JUSTICE
PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY TO HELP OTHERS (.63, .76)	.21*	.09
VISION TO HELP (.69, .69)	.30*	.36
KNOWLEDGE/SOCIAL CAPITAL FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (.60, .69)	.94**	.17
LEADERSHIP EFFICACY (.80, .82)	.31**	.12
AGENCY TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY (.68, .65)	.24**	.47*
GOV'T RESPONSIBILITY FOR THOSE IN NEED (.66, .70)	.24*	.29*
INTEREST IN POLITICS (.78, .83)	.03	.33*
STRUCTURAL/INDIVIDUAL EXPLANATIONS FOR POVERTY (.61, .62)	-.10	.28*

* We are at least 95% certain that a change occurred in the direction indicated

** We are at least 99% certain that a change occurred in the direction indicated

Figure 2. Assessing Democratic Values

BAYSIDE STUDENTS FOR JUSTICE

The second program, Bayside Students For Justice, aimed to develop community activists. For example, some students investigated the lack of access to a local health care center for women. Others sought ways to challenge a Senate bill that would put students and their parents in jail for truancy and would try juveniles as adults for certain crimes.

Students chose to focus their project on a variety of manifestations of violence in their world, including domestic violence, child abuse, and gang violence. Students arrived at this choice through a process, in which the teacher had them "map" their communities (to

gain a sense of what issues affected their lives and the lives of others in their community) and write about an issue that deeply angered or affected them. Their work on this topic was combined with a domestic violence curriculum the teacher decided to use and a three day retreat on violence prevention. They focused on the social, political, and economic causes and consequences of violence.

Even before students started the research and service aspects of their projects, their teacher noted that, through the process of community mapping and choosing their topic, students had begun to think of themselves differently. They had begun to see themselves as part of a youth community with the potential to transform and improve society to make it more just.

One student put it this way:

I can see through all of the veils that we wear. I know it and that is why I have so much anger....I ask why can't it be another way? How] can I make a difference? One person with good intentions in a bad world cannot make a difference. This is what the structure of our society makes me believe. Yet, I know that if I take the stand others will follow slowly.

Another student said:

Before this experience, I thought school was just about passing this test or that test...Now I finally see [that] like Malcolm X said, focusing on what matters can let you change yourself and then you can use your knowledge of history to make a better world.

Like their Madison County peers, the Bayside students expressed a passion for the real-world connections to their academic studies. But these students appeared to take away different lessons. To a much greater degree, these students talked about the need for forms of civic involvement that addressed issues of social justice and macro-level critique of society. Students also expressed a strong sense of the need to address these problems collectively rather than as individuals. After sharing in class the song, "We Who Believe in Freedom" by Sweet Honey in the Rock, one young man wrote that "whether the

struggle is big or small it should be everyone's responsibility together....Movements are not about me, they're about us."

This difference in orientation between the two programs was also reflected in our survey results. While students who participated in Madison County Youth Service League reported an increased sense of personal responsibility to help others and sizable increases on measures related to active participation (vision to help, knowledge/social capital for community development, and leadership efficacy), those in Bayside Students for Justice reported increased interest in politics (.33) and they became more likely to put forward structural explanations for poverty(+.28) (see Figure 2).

Another Difference:

Both programs showed increased commitment to community service (+.45) and greater likelihood that they would volunteer in the efforts to improve the community (+.52). At the same time that there were these statistically significant increases, however, the survey indicated a statistically significant decrease (-.43) in students' belief that they would "volunteer to do something like tutoring kids, visiting the elderly, being a mentor, or coaching a team." Thus, it appears that the more explicitly political focus of this curriculum shifted students' commitments towards community involvement, but not towards traditional visions of community service. This further illustrates our more general point that blanket statements regarding a program's impact on students' "commitment to the community" may miss many highly relevant distinctions.

* * *

So, what does all of this mean for assessment/empirical research on democratic values? First, different service learning programs advance different beliefs, understandings, and capacities reflecting very different notions of who a good citizen is and what a good citizen does. It follows, then, that assessment strategies should capture rather than obscure these differences.

Second, the development of citizens cannot be assessed in the same way that we commonly assess the ability to decode words or solving a math problem. There are not "right" answers or even "better" answers to many relevant questions. Knowing, for example, whether a student now places greater emphasis on recycling or on environmental regulation does not enable us to say that a program was effective, but it does help us understand the program's effects.

Finally, politics are, indeed, deeply embedded in what we assess and how we frame the assessment. We can ask about changes in personal responsibility, in government responsibility, or in employer responsibility, for example. If we ask only about personal responsibility, we're putting forward a very conservative notion of citizenship, that of the "responsible citizen"; Similarly, we can be interested in politics or in community involvement or in volunteering—the "participatory citizen"; or in social change and structural analyses of social problems—the "social reformer."

Regardless of the goals any of us hope to pursue, assessment has to be cognizant of and responsive to these important ideological distinctions. The choices we make in what we measure have consequences for the kinds of society we may find. Scholars must attend to these choices.

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